Shoko Fujita's story

Dili, Timor-Leste: My name is Shoko Fujita, I am from Japan. I arrived in Dili, Timor-Leste in May 2011. Soon after having joined UNICEF, I went on a field trip to Aileu and Manufahi districts to assess and monitor the situation of children there. In five months, I have already travelled almost through all the districts except for Ermera.

After having graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University with a master’s degree in International Studies and Diplomacy, I started working with the Japan Committee for UNICEF. As an Advocacy Officer, I was in charge of promoting children’s rights and protecting children from commercial sexual exploitation which led to my eagerness to get directly involved with UNICEF activities in developing countries.

As part of the UNICEF Child Protection Team, I work on reclassification of crimes in line with the Timor-Leste Penal Code and developing common data collection tools to register criminal cases involving children. This aims to promote better coordination among child protection actors including the Vulnerable Person’s Unit of National Police Timor-Leste.
I started preparing for a nationwide advocacy campaign to raise public awareness on Violence Against Children for implementation next year. In conducting interviews with members of child protection networks in the districts, they often insist on the importance of disseminating information about children’s rights and protection issues at the suco (village) and aldeia (town) levels. I expect that the campaign will not only raise awareness of child protection within the communities, but also among children to understand that they have a right to access social and legal services, as well as encourage incident reporting to authorities.

Currently, I am engaged in organizing a big event to be held on 20 November 2011, coinciding with Universal Children’s Day and the anniversary of Convention of the Rights of the Child. The event is called the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children (DPAC) and is a global initiative to mobilize religious communities to work together for children’s well-being. The theme for 2011-2013 is Violence against Children. This DPAC initiative will be a good starting point for building networks with various sectors to protect children from all forms of violence, bringing global and local attention with coordination from NGOs and other protection actors.

I had a fulfilling experience, both professionally and personally, in Timor-Leste and enjoyed visiting the districts in particular. In addition to official field trips, I have already seen the glorious view of Jaco Island. I even conquered Foho Ramelau, the highest mountain in the country. What I like most about going to the districts is to meet the children living there; photos of those children with shy smiles are treasures to me.